

Message Text

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SUBJECT: KING MAKES MINOR SHIFTS IN COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

1. ON NOVEMBER 10 PALACE ANNOUNCED MINOR CHANGES IN COUNCIL OF MINISTERS. DROPPED FROM COUNCIL WERE MINISTER OF STATE FOR WATER AND POWER NARAYAN DUTTA BHATTA, ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR LAND REFORM DAYA BIKRAM SHAH AND ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR FORESTS, BAHADUR SINGH AITWAL. ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, PRAKASH CHAND MUKHIA, HAS BEEN PROMOTED TO RANK OF MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR WATER, POWER AND FORESTS. THREE NEW APPOINTEES NAMED AT ASSISTANT MINISTER LEVEL: LABARU RANA THARU FOR FORESTS, HIRA LAL BISHWAKARMA FOR EDUCATION AND DEVDHARI PRASAD KALWAR FOR LAND REFORM. IN ONLY OTHER SHIFT OF RESPONSIBILITIES, PORTFOLIO FOR HEALTH WAS TAKEN AWAY FROM EDUCATION MINISTER ARYAL AND TRANSFERRED TO MINISTER FOR WORKS AND TRANSPORT, PRAYAG SINGH SUWAL.

2. COMMENT: THOSE CHANGES WHICH DID TAKE PLACE STRIKE US AS FAR LESS IMPORTANT THAN THOSE WHICH DID NOT HAPPEN. RUMORS HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING FOR SEVERAL WEEKS THAT IMPORTANT MODIFICATIONS WOULD BE MADE IN COUNCIL OF MINISTERS. ACCORDING TO THESE RUMORS PRIME MINISTER RIJAL WAS DETERMINED TO OUST SEVERAL KEY MINISTERS, INCLUDING FONMIN KARKI AND

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HOME MINISTER H.B. SHRESTHA. KARKI, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS SAID TO

HAVE DISPLEASED PALACE BY HIS HANDLING OF SIKKIM AFFAIRS. HOME MINISTER WAS UNDER FIRE FOR "MISMANAGEMENT" OF KHAMPA RESETTLEMENT AND HIS INABILITY TO RAM THROUGH TERRORIST BILL IN PANCHAYAT. CABINET CHANGES WERE TO HAVE GIVEN HMG OPPORTUNITY TO REVITALIZE MINISTERIES THROUGH APPOINTMENT OF "YOUNG BLOOD" AT ASSISTANT MINISTER LEVEL.

3. NONE OF THESE EXPECTATIONS WERE FULFILLED IN WHAT WE ASSUME IS LAST CABINET RESHUFFLE PRIOR TO CORONATION. NEW APPOINTEES, FAR FROM BEING DYNAMIC, ARE FOR MOST PART OLD BUREAUCRATS WHO REPRESENT SPECIAL INTERESTS. THARU APPOINTMENT, FOR EXAMPLE, SATISFIES TRIBAL INTERESTS WHILE BISHWAKARMA AND KALWAR HAVE WON SMALL REPUTATIONS BY DEFENDING INTERESTS OF UNTOUCHABLES AND OTHER LOW CASTES WITHIN GOVERNMENT. WHILE IT IS UNCLEAR WHY RIJAL LOST HIS BID TO MAKE MAJOR CHANGES, MANY PEOPLE WILL AGREE WITH EDITORIALS IN NOVEMBER 11 COMMONER AND HIMALI BELA WHICH SAID THAT MINOR PERSONNEL CHANGES WERE NOT THE ANSWER TO URGENT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS FACING COUNTRY. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT NEW CABINET WILL BE IN ANY BETTER POSITION THAN ITS PREDECESSOR TO TACKLE TOUGH PROBLEMS OR CREATE BOLD SOLUTIONS. WE ASSUME ANOTHER RESHUFFLE WILL CONSEQUENTLY BE NEEDED AFTER CORONATION.

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